

2003 Severe Weather Summary

Southwest Kansas

National Weather Service, Dodge City

With the exception of a little snow on the first day of 2003, the month of January was relatively quiet. Icy conditions developed in the Hays area on the 15th and this led to 50 accidents in Ellis county, with 28 occurring in Hays. January observed mild temperatures with the average 3.5 to 4 degrees above normal.

Although February started very mild, the month ended around 5 degrees below normal. Morning lows dropped below zero across much of the area on the 24th and 25th. Ashland, the Garden City airport and the Hays airport all fell to 6 below zero. The Garden City airport established a record low for four straight days from the 23rd through the 26th. The first of two potent winter storms hit the area on the 23rd with 10 to 14 inches of snow falling from Kiowa to Coldwater to Cimarron up to Scott City. As much as 14 to 16 inches of snow was common from 10 miles south of Dodge City to Coldwater to near Kiowa in Barber county. The second storm brought heavy snow on the 28th with 6 to 9 inches of snow from McCracken in Rush county, through Ness City to Garden City into western Grant county.

With a deep snow cover on the ground during the last several days of February, cold weather continued through the first few days of March until the snow finally melted away. The rest of March was relatively quiet with no significant weather occurring.

The severe weather season got underway on April 15th as storms produced large hail and wind in excess of 60 mph mainly across the western part of the area. There were a few days of severe weather the rest of the month. The first tornado occurred on the 23rd about 14 miles south of Greensburg. This tornado was over open country and did not do any damage, and only lasted several minutes.

May was fairly active with severe weather. On the 15th two tornadoes moved through parts of Liberal destroying several mobile homes and throwing a pickup into the debris. Many other homes in the area received heavy roof damage. There was at least 20 million dollars worth of damage. Eight other tornadoes occurred that evening. But that wasn't all! That same evening, hail pummeled Kismet and vicinity destroying roofs, stripping trees of leaves (even cedar and pine trees), breaking windows, and severely damaging vehicles. Also, torrential rain fell during the evening of the 15th in northeastern Seward county and northwestern Meade county. High water closed Highway 54 between Kismet and Plains. Railroad ties were washed out and the tracks ended up closed for repairs for over 48 hours. Rainfall in the area ranged from 8 to 10 inches. Unofficial bucket surveys indicated that up to 17 inches fell on the area!

June was also an active month with severe weather. The 28th was especially busy with as many as 55 reports of large hail or high winds from about mid-afternoon through mid-evening. Most of the reports were in the two southern row of counties. Liberal was hardest hit again as the

combination of 80 to 100 mph wind and hail bigger than golf balls produced at least 8 million dollars in damage. The month of June was also relatively cool across the area. Dodge City recorded below normal temperatures for 18 of the 19 days from the 3rd to the 21st.

Not much unusual happened in July with just some hot days and the typical severe weather. Dodge City recorded a total of fourteen 100 degree days, with the first occurring on the 3rd. The 14th was very hot with Ashland and Ness City both reporting 113 degrees and Medicine Lodge 111 degrees.

August was an active month for severe weather, especially during the second half. A nearly stationary thunderstorm developed in northwestern Ford county on the 29th and produced torrential rainfall and flooding from west of Dodge City to the northern part of the city. Eight to nine inches of rain had fallen in a 4 to 5 hour period. The highest amount reported was 9.9 inches six miles west of Dodge City. Very heavy rain also produced flooding in parts of Stevens, Barber and Pratt counties.

Relatively cool weather prevailed across southwest Kansas during the month of September. Dodge City ended up with the sixth coolest September on record and was 4.3 inches below normal. Heavy rainfall occurred again at Dodge City but was spread over a six day period. from the 6th to the 11th when 4.96 inches of rain fell. The month ended up as the fourth wettest on record. Hays also received very heavy rain on the 10th with as much as 6.58 inches reported. There was extensive street flooding in the city causing numerous vehicles to stall in the high water. Several streets were barricaded as a result of the high water. Although there were several days of severe weather, the severe weather season was winding down across the area.

The month of October was quiet as far as any weather goes. For the first 17 days of the month, Dodge City did not see a temperature reach 80 degrees. The average high temperature was 70.7 degrees, but very warm temperatures occurred from the 18th to the 23rd. Highs across the area ranged anywhere from the upper 80s to the mid 90s. There were at least a few record highs established everyday during this period.

Although heavy rains fell in late August and September, many areas of Southwest Kansas remained in the grips of a three year drought. Conditions were eased, but much more rain will be needed into 2004. Shelter belts of trees that were planted in the 1930s and 1940s continued to show severe stress from the long-term drought in some areas.

Winter type weather finally arrived on November 22nd and 23rd when Arctic air overspread the area dropping temperatures into the single digits in many areas and bringing an inch or two of snow to the northwest part of southwest Kansas.

For 2003, 13 tornadoes were reported in southwest Kansas. The annual average is 14.

KANSAS SEVERE WEATHER AWARENESS WEEK
MARCH 15 - 19, 2004